

PERPLEXED, BUT NOT IN DESPAIR

J. M. BUCKLY

To a large number of persons there are many things in the moral universe of God that seem utterly incomprehensible. They approach these things with fear and trembling, wrestle with them, and often come away from the wrestling in defeat and despair. There are men who do not hesitate to inform us that if they were the creators of the moral universe they would not have certain things as they are. They would have harmony where now is discord; joy where now is sorrow; virtue where now is sin; aspiration for things lovely, pure, true, and of good report where now is groveling in the dregs and mire of the lower levels of human existence.

These questions have not ceased to be raised even this day: "Why should there be sin in the world, and sorrow, and pain, and anguish of spirit, and disappointment, and vexation of soul?" "Who is originally responsible, and why should the responsibility and the punishment descend from the original sinner or sinners to vex and crush all who follow after?"

There is a good deal of specious reasoning on these and kindred questions. We are constantly attempting to shift responsibility to some other shoulders, when it should in all justice rest upon our own. Perhaps, if we reasoned honestly, with sufficient facts before us, we might find that the origin and cause of our vexation and sorrow is sometimes nearer at hand than we are willing to believe. We might find that a measure of responsibility lies at our own door, and the conclusion might be forced upon our honest minds that these sorrows and difficulties of our own creation ought to be borne without complaint, as becometh those who are willing to bear their own burdens and suffer for their own wanderings and blunders.

And yet there is a good deal of mystery in the trial of God's saints. We do not know much about the origin and reason for such visitations and experiences of divine providence as often befall God's children. We cannot scatter much of the darkness and mystery that confine the inscrutable purposes of God. But, for all that, we are assured that those purposes are always wise and beneficent, because the heart of God is good, and is filled with loving-kindness and tender mercy toward his children, erring tho they be. We are, then, often compelled to recall the words of divine illumination, instruction, and inspiration: "What I do thou knowest not now; but thou shalt know hereafter."

But not every soul that is crushed by the heavy hand of sorrow rises easily to that climax of Christian faith and hope. Destruction brings discontent. Disappointment is discouraging. Rebellion naturally follows after defeat. Our weak human nature is constructed upon, or has degenerated to, that low level. When disease lays the strong body low; when the loved one—child, companion, parent, friend—is torn away from

our side by death's ruthless hand; when adversity flaps its sable wing in exultant defiance in our face; when our ambitions play us false, and our fondest hopes decay; when the friend upon whom we leaned proves untrue at the critical moment; when our character is unjustly assailed, and we are persecuted for righteousness' sake; when all is dark and dismal where all was light and gladness of heart; when the awful storm has left us broken and bleeding and helpless and hopeless—then it is not so easy to look into the Father's face and say: "It is good for me that I have been afflicted." If the bruised soul does not reach that sublime climax of faith, let him receive due measure of praise if, in his bewilderment and sorrow, he cries out: "O God, my Father! Thou art great and Thou art good. But Thou hast sorely afflicted me! Thy ways are hidden from me! I am dumb before Thee! Who can understand Thy purposes? Yet in Thee do I put my trust. Give me comfort; give me peace!"

Sorrow is woven and interwoven with the fabric of life. If there were no other source of information, the faces of the people we pass on the street would declare it to us. What a large proportion of sad faces there are among them. How the lines of discontent are drawn upon them—deep and severe. Here is a face stamped with passion; there one drawn and furrowed with sorrow; yonder one haunted with perplexity and fear. It is worth while to study those faces. They may dissolve something of the mystery that may be troubling some souls. One does not have to watch these faces long before it is noticed that while some are about equally marked with lines denoting anguish and suffering, yet they produce totally different impressions. One face bears the impress of sweet serenity and unruffled patience, borne of a spirit of gracious resignation, while another is black and severe with evident discontent and the spirit of open rebellion. At a glance you are assured that one bears his sorrow and suffering with patience, because he leans upon some higher and stronger power with which his soul is in complete harmony, and that the other is morose and rebellious because he has spurned with contempt the help and sympathy of that higher and stronger power. The first man has learned a great secret: that even in the most terrific hurricanes of life there may still be heard the sweet voice of the God of storms, who also is the God of peace, while in the heart of the other, not having come into possession of that satisfying knowledge, the awful tempest still rages.

"Not always under calm and sunny skies
The Lord doth meet us, tho we seek Him there,
Eager to hear Him talk of lilies fair
And utter parables that make men wise;
Nor do we find the One whose word we prize
Always at feasts, tho He doth love to share
Our social joys, and when we feasts prepare
'Tis He with better wine our want supplies;
But sometimes on the wings of storm He comes,
In the black midnight of our dark despair,
Mid raging waves and winds that never cease,

When the helm fails us, and the cold benumbs
Our helpless hands—then, as we lift our prayer
He speaks, and lo! our hearts are filled with peace "

The soul whose confidence is in GOD will not be seeking constantly for a sign and a satisfactory answer to his question as to the purpose of GOD in adversity, but, when in sorrow or tribulation of any sort, he will fly to the bosom of the good Father for comfort. And he will be strengthened in his spirit as he is reminded that "all things work together for good to them that love GOD," and that "our light afflictions, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; while we look not at the things which are seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal."

Brevities

More than 1000 kinds of rubber shoes are made in the United States.

One year's sweepings of the British mint yield over \$5,000 in gold and silver.

All the flowers of the Arctic region are either white or yellow, and there are 762 varieties.

Five tons of frozen eels from New Zealand have been placed on the market at London.

Every boy in Germany, from the crown prince to the meanest subjects, is obliged to learn some useful trade.

Child labor in North Carolina mills has decreased 50 per cent in the past three years.

Kissing is almost unknown in Japan. A mother never kisses her child, a lover never kisses his sweetheart.

The number of rooms in a house, of windows or doors in a room, even of rungs on a ladder, in Siam must always be odd. Even numbers are considered unlucky.

The metal in the big bell of Moscow weighs nearly 200 tons, and is valued at several thousand pounds.

So useful are toads in gardens that they are sold in France by the dozen for stocking gardens, to free them from many injurious insects.

Morocco is famous for its fine mules. The best come from Fez and are worth \$200 each.

A woman who wears a stuffed bird on her hat is liable to a fine of from \$25 to \$50, by a law recently passed by the legislature of Arkansas.

Kansas has a potato field forty miles long. This year's harvest from it will come close to 4,000 car-loads. An average crop is 300 bushels an acre.

Coins bearing the names of Emperors who existed over 2,000 years ago are still in daily circulation in China.

Locks like those in use today, which could only be opened by the knowledge of a certain combination of numbers, were known to the Chinese centuries ago, while Hobbs gave his name to a lock found in an Egyptian tomb.

From many parts of New England this summer comes the news that the song birds seem to be more in evidence than they have been for many years. An old Rangely guide said recently that it was hardly within his recollection of the past 20 years that the birds had been so abundant or of so many species as they may be seen this year. In the want of any other reason to account for the welcome change, it seems fair to assume that the New England laws for the protection of insectivorous birds are beginning to have some effect.